

## ***The "Moveable Well" in 1 Cor 10:4: An Extrabiblical Tradition in an Apostolic Text***

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*The purpose of this study is to explore the presence and implications of a Jewish exegetical tradition in Paul's appeal to the exodus/wilderness episode in 1 Cor 10:4. The goal is threefold: (1) to establish that 1 Cor 10:4 is in fact an example of a ubiquitous exegetical tradition that understood the rock in the desert (Exodus 17; Numbers 20-21) as being in some sense mobile: it "followed" the Israelites; (2) to explore briefly the exegetical process that gave rise to this tradition; and (3) to explore some of the implications raised by the presence of this tradition in Paul's letter, specifically concerning the nature of inspiration and scriptural authority, and to offer a time-honored suggestion toward a solution.*

*Key Words: 1 Cor 10:4, early Jewish interpretation, use of OT in NT*

### *1 Cor 10:4 as a Witness to an Exegetical Tradition*

In 1 Cor 10:1-13, Paul is exhorting his readers to stand firm in the midst of temptation (vv. 11-13). He uses as the object lesson the example of Israel's wilderness disobedience despite God's provision for them (vv. 1-5). Part of this provision includes the miraculous supply of food and drink (vv. 3-4). The focus of this study is vs. 4, which says, "they all drank from the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed (*ἀκολουθούσης*) them. The Rock was Christ." In understanding the rock as mobile, Paul's statement bears a strong resemblance to a popular extrabiblical tradition found in a variety of Jewish sources dating roughly from the New Testament era to medieval rabbinic compilations. Three of these sources are reproduced below.<sup>1</sup>

1. For a helpful synopsis of the various forms of the tradition and a list of further sources, see E. Earle Ellis, "A Note on First Corinthians 10:4," *JBL* 76 (1957) 53-56, reprinted in Ellis's *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 66-70. See also Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 448, n. 34; and H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud and Midrash* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1926) 3.406-8.

*Pseudo-Philo's Book of Biblical Antiquities* 10:7; 11:15; 20:8<sup>2</sup>

Now he led his people out into the wilderness; for forty years he rained down for them bread from heaven and brought quail to them from the sea and brought forth *a well of water to follow them*.

And there [in the desert] he commanded him [Moses] many things and showed him the tree of life, from which he cut off and took and threw into Marah, and the water of Marah became sweet. *And it [the water] followed them in the wilderness forty years and went up to the mountain with them and went down into the plains*.

And after Moses died, the manna stopped descending upon the sons of Israel, and they began to eat from the fruits of the land. And these are the three things that God gave to his people on account of the three persons; that is the well of the water of Marah for Miriam and the pillar of cloud for Aaron and the manna for Moses. And when these came to their end [i.e., died], these three things were taken away from them.<sup>3</sup>

*Tosephta Sukka* 3.11<sup>4</sup>

And so the well which was with the Israelites in the wilderness was a rock, the size of a large round vessel, surging and gurgling upward, as from the mouth of its little flask, *rising with them up onto the mountains, and going down with them into the valleys. Wherever the Israelites would encamp, it made camp with them*, on a high place, opposite the entry of the Tent of Meeting. The princes of Israel come and surround it with their staffs, and they sing a song concerning it: *Spring up, O Well! Sing to it; [the well which the princes dug, which the nobles of the people delved with the scepter and with their staves]* (Num 21:17-18).

*Targum Onqelos to Num* 21:16-20<sup>5</sup>

At that time the well was *given* to them, that is the well about which the Lord told Moses, "Gather the people together, and *I will give* them water." So Israel offered this praise, "Rise O well, sing to it." The well which the princes dug, the leaders of the people dug, the scribes, with

2. The translation is that of D. J. Harrington in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; 2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 2.317, 319, 329. Pseudo-Philo's work is typically dated to the first century AD. Harrington argues for the likelihood of a date before AD 70 (2.299). For a similar impression see G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1973) 6 and notes.

3. That the water ceased after Miriam's death clearly implies that it continued alongside the Israelites as long as she was alive. This passage is to be understood in the context of the previous two.

4. J. Neusner, *The Tosephta, Translated from the Hebrew* (6 vols.; New York: Ktav, 1981) 2.220.

5. B. Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Leviticus and the Targum Onqelos to Numbers* (The Aramaic Bible 8; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988) 126.

their staffs, and *it was given to them*, since wilderness <times>. Now since *it was given to them, it went down with them to the valleys*, and from the valleys it went up with them to the high country. And from the high country to the descents of the Moabite fields, at the summit of the height, which looks out towards Beth Yeshimon.

There are, of course, clear differences between these versions of the tradition and what we see in 1 Cor 10:4, primarily the degree of elaboration and the mention of a "well" (at least in Pseudo-Philo and *Targum Onqelos*) rather than merely the rock. These differences are important in discussing the precise developmental state of this tradition when 1 Corinthians was written. (For example, does the fact that a "well" is not mentioned in 1 Cor 10:4 suggest that this portion of the tradition had not yet developed?<sup>6</sup>) Although differences such as these are worthy of discussion, they should not allow us to overlook the simple and, as I see it, incontestable fact that Paul's statement is evidence of the existence of a "moveable well" tradition *of some sort* as early as the first century AD.<sup>7</sup> What all of these sources share is a description of a mobile source of water. This is the central issue, and the forms the water supply took or the varying degrees of elaboration in the sources are incidental to the heart of the tradition.<sup>8</sup> Paul, in saying that the rock "followed" the Israelites, is one witness to an established exegetical tradition.

The foregoing view has enjoyed widespread support over roughly the past 100 years, and is therefore not unique to the present study.<sup>9</sup>

6. Ellis, for example, argues that the tradition in Paul's day only referred to "a following stream of water" ("Note" 54).

7. As Ellis remarks, "It is quite difficult to determine the precise character of the fable in the first century. . . . Certainly the rabbinical references are not lacking, and their abundance points to the early existence of the legend *in some form*" ("Note" 54, my emphasis).

8. A. J. Bandstra, for example, who sees Paul's comment as essentially independent of the "moveable well" tradition, remarks that "the legend of the rock accompanying Israel was not extant *in that form* in Paul's day" ("Interpretation in 1 Corinthians 10:1–11," *CTJ* 6 [1971] 11; my emphasis). This, however, seems to miss the more basic point that *some* form of the tradition apparently did exist. Furthermore, Bandstra argues that, since Paul seems to consider the rock the source of both Israel's *food* and drink, the Philonic version of the tradition has more bearing on 1 Cor 10:4 (cf. *Leg. Alleg.* II, 86, where the rock, identified with Wisdom, was also Israel's source of both food and drink ["Interpretation," 12–13]). Yet the absence of any notion of "following" in Philo brings us back to the same question; from where does Paul get this element? Whether the rock supplied food and drink or just drink does not address this issue. The connection to Philo is, if anything, in Paul identifying the rock with Christ (as Philo does with Wisdom). The following rock, however, "clearly brings him into connection with the Palestinian legend" (H. St. John Thackeray, *The Relation of St. Paul to Contemporary Jewish Thought* [New York: Macmillan, 1900] 211).

9. Perhaps most adamant is Thackeray. He considers 1 Cor 10:4 one of the "undoubted instances of the use of such legendary matter in St. Paul" (*Relation of St. Paul*,

The brevity, however, of Paul's allusion may be one factor that has given some commentators reason to doubt Paul's essential participation in this broader tradition. Such a position is not without scholarly support, perhaps the most recent adherent being Walter Kaiser.<sup>10</sup>

Kaiser attributes Paul's statement to the apostle's own conscious application of a combination of (1) various OT texts that speak of the Angel of the LORD who *accompanied* the Israelites in the desert (e.g., Exod 13:21; 14:19, 30) and (2) Exod 17:6, which associates the Lord

204). He continues: "As we shall see that this legend occurs in the earliest source of Rabbinic lore to which we have access, there cannot be the slightest doubt that St. Paul is alluding to it when he speaks of the ἀκολουθοῦσα πέτρα, although several commentators refuse to admit that there is any such reference" (p. 205). After citing the Targums and Pseudo-Philo, Thackeray concludes, "This digression into Jewish Haggadah is merely intended to show how early and widespread this legend was, and to disprove the statement that such childish fancies could not have been among the traditions in which he was so proficient (Gal. 1:14)" (p. 210). A sampling of others who understand Paul's comment in light of the tradition include H. Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), 196-97; C. Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (THKNT 7/2; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1982) 42-43; P. Bachmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (KNT 7; Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1921) 330; M. McNamara, *Palestinian Judaism and the New Testament* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983) 241-44; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 222; Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 3.406-8; J. Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth, 1962) 86-88; W L. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (SBLDS 68; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) 133-42; Fee, *Corinthians*, 448; A. McEwen, "Paul's Use of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4," *Vox Reformato* 47 (1986) 7-8.

10. *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985) 115-16. Kaiser follows the general line of argument previously set forth by Bandstra ("Interpretation," 11) and E Godet (*Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889]). Kaiser in particular, however, argues on the basis of the brevity of Paul's statement for the independence of 1 Cor 10:4 from this popular Jewish tradition. He mentions that "the only two correspondences between those embellished rabbinic traditions" and Paul's two comments: "(1) both refer to the water which Israel drank; and (2) both refer to something 'accompanying' or 'following' Israel. This is hardly a convincing parallelism!" (*Uses*, 115-16). It seems to me, however, that these correspondences are extremely convincing. Godet makes explicit an apologetic motive by arguing that "the most spiritual of the apostles" could hardly have "alluded to so ridiculous a fable" (*Commentary*, 2.56). Although he neither mentions nor interacts with the Midrashic evidence, F. W. Grosheide's comments also seem to be an attempt to distance Paul from the tradition (*Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953] 220-22). C. Hodge comments that the presence of this tradition in 1 Cor 10:4 would make "the apostle responsible for this Jewish fable, and is inconsistent with his divine authority" (*A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1881; reprinted, London: Banner of Truth, 1964] 174). It is precisely this issue, whether divine authority precludes the presence of extrabiblical traditions in the NT, that will be discussed below.

with the rock ("I will stand there before you *by the rock* at Horeb").<sup>11</sup> In other words, the implication of such an approach is that Paul's comment is similar to the existing tradition in content but absolutely independent of it in origin.

There are merits to the arguments put forth by Kaiser and others, particularly in offering possible explanations of the biblical factors that went into the creation of this tradition and in addressing the apparent incompatibility of the presence of a rather pedestrian Jewish legend in the writings of a holy apostle. The latter concern is particularly important, and I will return to both issues below. Yet, in the final analysis, it seems that such a position is difficult to maintain. First, the presence of a "moveable well" in Pseudo-Philo demonstrates that such a tradition was roughly contemporaneous with Paul. As such, the possibility of Paul's knowledge of and participation in this tradition must be taken seriously.<sup>12</sup> Second, the brevity of Paul's comment cannot argue for the essential independence of 1 Cor 10:4 from the tradition of a "moveable well" broadly considered, especially if the essential element, its mobility, is included. Third, it seems to me that little is gained by ascribing to Paul such midrashic activity (which could itself be considered unworthy of apostolic exegesis) when the clear existence of a "moveable well" tradition outside of the New Testament lends itself to another, and perhaps more straightforward, explanation. Moreover, despite the source of the midrashic activity that produced the tradition in question (whether Paul or, as

11. Such a midrash as Kaiser is suggesting *may* have been anticipated by the comment on Exod 17:6 in *Mek. Vay. 7.56-58* (see Str-B, 48, and W F. Orr and J. A. Walther, *I Corinthians: A New Translation* [AB 32; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976] 245). The Mekilta's comment reads, "God said to him: Wherever you find the mark of man's feet, there I am before you" (שם אני לפניך) (J. Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* [Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933] 2.133; I have modernized Lauterbach's translation somewhat.). But this midrash speaks only of God's promise to be an abiding presence with the Israelites. It does not make the further midrashic connection to a mobile supply of water. Bandstra also, in attempting to explain the mobility of the rock in 1 Cor 10:4 (having already concluded that Paul's comment is more closely identified with Philo than with the rabbinic tradition; see n. 8 above), suggests that "Paul may have constructed his own midrash on the basis of many Old Testament passages—especially on the basis of the Great Song of Moses in Deut 32" ("Interpretation," 13). Bandstra, however, seems somewhat reluctant to draw a definitive conclusion (see also "Interpretation," 14) and appears to leave open the possibility of another solution.

12. Kaiser's remark that "the *alleged* rabbinic tradition of an accompanying rock is not known to have existed *in Paul's day*," does not take into account the available evidence (*Uses*, 116; my emphasis). The presence of this tradition in Pseudo-Philo's *Book of Biblical Antiquities* shows it to be quite *early* ("in Paul's day") and *documented* (not "alleged"). Furthermore, the documentary evidence of a particular exegetical tradition does not in and of itself determine the date of the tradition's origin. Its existence in written form in any one particular text does not by any means suggest that the tradition itself was created at that point.

the ubiquity of the tradition shows, someone far earlier), two facts remain: (1) The OT does not actually speak of a rock that followed the Israelites through the desert, provided water along the way. A mobile rock supplying water is at best an inference resulting from the [midrashic] combination of several disparate passages. (2) Such a tradition indeed exists with great frequency outside of the NT. Laying aside for the moment the resulting doctrinal difficulties, the most reasonable conclusion to be drawn from these points is that Paul's very similar statement in 1 Cor 10:4 must be understood within the context of this broader tradition, not apart from it. It seems clear that Paul's "the rock that followed them" is not his invention. The central issue, therefore is not *whether* some form of this tradition provides the proper backdrop for Paul's comment, but *why*, and the implications of this fact. Before discussing this question, however, it might be worth exploring how this tradition might have arisen in the first place, which will provide some perspective from which to view Paul's comment.

### *The Exegetical Motives Behind the Tradition*

It is helpful to ask why such a tradition exists at all, since the OT does not speak of a rock following the Israelites. What is the process that would have led to the existence of such an apparently fanciful and biblically unsupported notion? To ask this question is really to ask about the nature of biblical interpretation in antiquity in general. A perusal of the seemingly endless literature relevant to the New Testament era (Pseudepigrapha, Apocrypha, Philo, Josephus, Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbinic writings, Targums), shows that such creative exegesis as we find in the three sources cited at the outset are the norm rather than a cause for surprise.<sup>13</sup> In this respect, these examples are merely *some* of the many comments on merely *one* biblical phenomenon, the water in the desert.

But having said this, we must resist the temptation to see comments such as these merely as creative flourishes or to relegate them to the ancient writer's overactive and capricious imagination. Despite appearances, the ultimate point of origin for many of these ancient traditions can be found in the biblical texts themselves; there are trig-

13. I would contend that the genre of "retellings" or "expansions" of the OT are particularly fruitful texts in which to locate the phenomenon. This genre is not limited to such prominent examples as *Jubilees*, *Book of Biblical Antiquities*, 1QapGen, *Joseph and Asenath*, or the expansionistic *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, but to the "rehearsals of salvation history," for example, in Sir 44-49 ("praise of famous men"), Heb 11, and the retelling of the exodus in Wis 10-19.

gers in the text that motivated some of the comments by these early interpreters. As such, many of these traditions are truly *exegetical*, that is based in the biblical text, and are driven by a hermeneutic that calls for a closer reading of the biblical text than is sometimes appreciated. As James Kugel puts it:

There is a tendency in readers--perhaps encouraged by the very form of these narrative expansions--to regard them as mere "poetic flights," or as expressions of some political/theological program that came to be associated, more or less at random, with one part or another of the biblical text, or again, as leftover bits of popular folklore that eventually became fused with this or that biblical figure or incident . . . so it seems worthwhile here to assert once again, without seeking to denigrate any of these interests and fields, that the *exegetical* side of these texts deserves our primary attention: anyone seeking to come to grips with such texts must first reckon with the exegetical motives of their audiences before turning to these others concerns.<sup>14</sup>

The effort to discover a biblical anchor to these traditions finds clear justification in the latter two examples cited above, the Tosephta and Targum Onqelos. Both of these texts concern themselves with Num 21:16-20 or some portion of that passage. What seems to have been the motivating factor in this passage is perhaps clearest in the Targum. A side-by-side comparison of Num 21:16-20 and the Targum reveals several differences, but there is one that is crucial.

Num 21:16 speaks of the provision of water that God "gave" (נתן) the Israelites at Beer: "Gather the people that I may give [נתתם] them water." What follows is the song the Israelites sang about the well ("Spring up, O well") in vv. 17-18a (see especially the Tosephta). The

14. James L. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990) 247-48. Hence, I prefer the term "exegetical tradition" or simply "tradition" to "fable" or "legend." I would be quick to add, however, along with Kugel, that not every peculiar comment made by these early interpreters is necessarily exegetically motivated. There are a host of other concerns (e.g., philosophical, apologetic) that are involved as well. Nevertheless, many comments are indeed exegetical, and treating them as such provides a most fruitful avenue of exploration. A similar approach to understanding the phenomenon of early biblical interpretation has been clearly articulated, for example, by R. Bloch, "Midrash," *DBSup* 5 (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1950; reprinted in *Theory and Practice: Approaches to Ancient Judaism*; ed. W S. Green; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978; 1.29-50); G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Early Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (SPB 4; Leiden: Brill, 1983), J. Weingreen, *From the Bible to Mishna: The Continuity of Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976). I have recently attempted to explain some of the comments on the exodus in the Wisdom of Solomon as examples of early traditions that have their ultimate point of origin in some exegetical activity ("Exodus Retold: Ancient Exegesis of the Departure from Egypt in Wis 10:15-21 and 19:1-9," Ph.D. diss.; Harvard University, 1994, and "A Retelling of the Song at the Sea in Wis 10, 20-21" (*Biblica* 76 [1995] 1-24).

concluding verses (vv. 18b-20) give the itinerary for the Israelites' travels through the desert. Vv. 18b-19 reads as follows: וּמִמַּדְבַּר מַטָּנָה וּמִנַּחֲלֵיאל וּבַמּוֹת, "And from the desert [they went to] *Mattanah*, and from *Mattanah* to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth." The Targum, however, reads Mattanah not as the first stop in their itinerary but as verb from the root נָתַן (Aram. אִתְּיָבַת). The result is that for the Targum, Num 21:18b-10 gives the itinerary for the well and not for the Israelites, hence: "and *it was given to them*, since wilderness [times]. Now since *it was given to them*, it went down with them to the valleys," etc.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, if we may take this a step further, it seems that rather than serving as the point of origin for the tradition as a whole, the word-play in Num 21:16-20 might itself be best understood as a further elaboration of a tradition that was ultimately motivated by a more basic factor in the biblical text. The fact is that the miraculous provision of water in the desert is mentioned only at the beginning of the wilderness wandering period (Exod 17, Rephidim; also the waters of Elim in Exod 15:22-27; see *Bib. Ant.* 11:15 above) and at the end (Num 20, Kadesh; Num 21, Beer). The question might well have arisen in the minds of ancient interpreters: what did the Israelites do in between? Did God give them water only twice during the forty years? Of course, an explanation that would resonate with modern interpreters would be to appeal to the selectivity of the biblical writer; his purpose was to recount the rebellions in the desert and not the miraculous supply of water. In other words, how the Israelites found water throughout their forty-year march in the desert is beside the point and, hence, not addressed in the wilderness narratives.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, despite the plausibility of such an explanation, we must not allow it to obstruct our view to the world of early biblical interpretation, which is, after all, the setting in which Paul wrote. It is precisely this type of difficulty that we see in the wilderness narrative—ambiguity, a gap in the narrative—that would have inspired *early interpreters* to offer an "explanation." The answer apparently supplied by

15. The same understanding of Mattanah is seen in *t. Erub.* 54a and *t. Ned.* 55a in their comments on Num 21:19. The latter reads as follows: "What is meant by 'And from the wilderness, Mattanah; and from Mattanah, Nahaliel; and from Nahaliel, Bamoth'?"—He replied, When one makes himself as the wilderness, which is free to all, the Torah is presented to him as a gift [*mattanah*] as it is written, 'And from the wilderness, *Mattanah*'. And once he has it as a gift, God gives it to him as an inheritance [*nahaliel*], as it is written, 'And from Mattanah, Nahaliel; . . .' (*The Babylonian Talmud* [ed. I. Epstein; London: Soncino, 1936] 173-74).

16. In Deut 2:7, for example, the ability of the Israelites to survive a generation of desert life is explicitly addressed.

this exegetical tradition is that the rock of Exodus 17 and the rock of Numbers 20 are one and the same. Hence, this rock must have accompanied the Israelites throughout their journey. The wordplay in Num 21:16-20, in my opinion, rather than serving as the point of origin for the tradition, is brought in at a later point to reinforce the notion of the well's mobility.<sup>17</sup> In any event, the "moveable well" should be understood as an exegetically motivated remark whose ultimate author is unknown, but whose exegetical activity survives in a multitude of extant ancient sources, including 1 Cor 10:4.

### *Conclusions*

There are three conclusions that may be drawn from the foregoing discussion:

1. An awareness of the intricacy and pervasiveness of the exegetical activity of Paul's world helps put 1 Cor 10:4 into a broader perspective. We would seem justified in concluding, therefore, that Paul's comment is not the result of conscious exegetical activity on his part. He is not encountering afresh the gap in the narrative between Exodus 17 and Numbers 20, nor has he discovered the wordplay in Num 21:16-20. Rather, he is merely one witness to a tradition that is itself the end product of exegetical activity.
2. If we are safe in concluding then that 1 Cor 10:4 participates in the broader tradition of the "moveable well," it is worth making the observation that Paul's allusion to that tradition is briefer than in the

17. This suggestion is in direct opposition to Thackeray's view that Num 21:16ff. is the point of origin (*The Relation of St. Paul*, 206). I, however, see the wordplay as a response (i.e., solution) to the more basic problem of Exodus 17/Numbers 20. The wordplay in Numbers 21 (Mattanah, "to give") is certainly one that could have been seized upon independent of other factors. Nevertheless, the fact that the wordplay was employed specifically *to provide the well's itinerary*, which is hardly a necessary conclusion, strongly suggests that the exegesis we see in *Targum Onqelos* was produced with a particular exegetical agenda already in mind. Thackeray also mentions the wordplay but seems to suggest that it would "naturally" have produced the midrash of the mobile well (p. 208). See also S. R. Driver, who argues that "the legend is based entirely upon the well of Num 21:17f" and that its inception has nothing to do with Exodus 17 or Numbers 20 ("Notes on Three Passages in St. Paul's Epistles," *The Expositor*, 3rd series, IX [1889] 17). P. Bachmann briefly alludes to a solution similar to what I am suggesting here (*Der erste Brief*, 330, n. 1), as does F. E. Bruce (*1 and 2 Corinthians* [NCB; Greenwood, SC: Attic, 1976] 91). Ellis sees the origin of the "following stream" version of the tradition (which he argues is earlier than the "following rock" tradition, and to which both Paul and the Targum refer) in LXX Pss 77:20; 104:41; Isa 48:21, all of which speak of water "gushing" out of a rock ("Note," 55). Ellis' argument is sensitive to certain aspects of Paul's comment, but I do not see these passages as being behind "the rock that followed them," since the idea of mobility is not in view.

other sources. This, if anything, rather than suggesting Paul's isolation from the broader tradition, actually argues for the antiquity of the tradition. It is precisely the brevity of the allusion that bespeaks the fact that it must have been in wide circulation already in Paul's day. Paul is merely making a shorthand reference to a previously existing tradition, one that not only he but presumably his readers as well were cognizant of. In this respect, the later, full-blown versions of this tradition in the sources cited above (and Pseudo-Philo is at best only slightly later) are to be understood *along with* 1 Cor 10:4 as witnesses to a tradition that preceded both. Variations of this tradition in the sources do not in any way affect the core unity of the tradition.

3. Somewhat related to this is the observation that Paul's comment seems somewhat superfluous to the hortatory-didactic context of the passage. Paul could simply have said that the rock in the desert was Christ rather than making a passing mention of its mobility. But as it stands, this remark is startling precisely because it is so incidental, almost offhand, and for this reason should not be overlooked. Why, after all, in the midst of a dire warning from Israel's history, would Paul incorporate an exegetical tradition of a mobile rock? The answer, it seems to me, is that Paul did not actually *incorporate* the tradition. To suggest such a thing is to imply that Paul's allusion to this tradition was conscious, which should not be assumed. To put it another way, Paul's incidental comment in 1 Cor 10:4 suggests that he was an inheritor of an "interpreted Bible." He is not himself interpreting the rock of the Old Testament, nor is he consciously adducing an existing exegetical tradition; rather, he is simply talking about the biblical story in the only way he knows how, in accordance with the way he (and apparently his audience as well) had received it. In other words, the exegetical tradition of the "moveable well" actually represents the way in which Paul *understood* the provision of water in the wilderness narratives of the Old Testament. Therefore, to ask why or how a holy apostle could have "employed" such a tradition raises unnecessary obstacles and even obscures the issue. Paul's understanding of the miraculous provision of water in the desert is a product of the exegetical environment in which he, as a learned Jew, lived and was taught (Phil 3:4-6; Acts 23:6; esp. Act 22:3).<sup>18</sup>

18. The assumption that Paul is consciously adapting the tradition is fairly common. Willis, for example, speaks of the tradition as being "in the air" during Paul's day (which might suggest an unconscious adaptation by Paul), but still speaks of looking for the root of Paul's "exposition" of the Old Testament (*Idol Meat in Corinth*), 137-38). Likewise, Thackeray speaks of Paul having "recourse" to the tradition "only to *draw* an allegorical meaning from it" (*Relation of St. Paul*, 210; my em-

### *Implications*

Paul was an inspired apostle. But he was also a man living in a certain place at a certain time with certain intellectual influences. This seems commonplace but is not always given full consideration when the topic turns to Paul (or any New Testament writer) as an interpreter of the Old Testament. That Paul's understanding of his Bible was determined *to a certain extent*<sup>19</sup> by his historical situation has at least one readily available modern analogy; the preaching of sermons. Not long ago, I heard a sermon where reference was made to Moses' uplifted hands and the subsequent defeat of the Amalekites in Exod 17:8-16. The preacher mentioned, somewhat matter-of-factly, that Moses' hands were raised *in prayer*. This may be the case, but it is at least worth mentioning that the biblical text itself does not mention

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phasis). H. Kuitert argues that "Paul *took* the story and *used* it in the service of his teaching about Jesus" (*Do You Understand What You Read?* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970] 42; my emphasis). Although I disagree with Thackeray and Kuitert, the suggestion is not unreasonable. Apparently, the point of the exegetical tradition is to make a statement of God's ever-present faithfulness to his people. Likewise, it could be argued that Paul "employed" this theology and applied it to Christ, thus emphasizing God's continued covenant faithfulness to his people in Christ in both the Old and New Dispensations. In other words, Paul would be consciously adapting the theology of this tradition without necessarily adopting its historicity or the exegetical methods by which this tradition arose. But despite the reasonableness of this suggestion, I am strongly inclined to disagree. (1) Even though the theology of the tradition fits nicely Paul's purpose, this in and of itself does not demonstrate a conscious adaptation of the tradition. One might just as easily argue the reverse, that Paul's understanding of Christ's presence in the Old Testament was itself the product of the theology of the moveable well tradition that he inherited. (2) To attempt to distance Paul here from the exegetical world in which he was at home would oblige one to do the same wherever Paul, or any other NT author, is apparently reproducing an extrabiblical tradition. Since the presence of extrabiblical traditions in the NT is such a common phenomenon (see examples mentioned below), it is perhaps best not to swim against such a strong current. Bandstra cites Kuitert at length ("Interpretation," 10-11), but, unlike Bandstra, Kuitert acknowledges the dependence of Paul's comment upon the rabbinic (better, pre-rabbinic) tradition. E F. Bruce argues that "Paul does not endorse this material fancy" (*1 and 2 Corinthians*, 91). M. McNamara, in my opinion, is closer to the mark in bringing out the subtleties of the presence of such a tradition in Paul's letter: "He is . . . referring to a nonbiblical tradition with which he expects his Corinthian audience to be acquainted or *which he himself takes so much for granted that he has forgotten that his Hellenistic or Gentile congregation might not be as well informed in such Jewish lore as he himself is*" (*Palestinian Judaism*, 241; my emphasis). I would push this one step further, that for Paul such "Jewish lore" actually represented his own understanding of the event.

19. I am by no means suggesting that Paul was a slave to his time, repeating only what others had said before him. The fact that he identifies the rock with *Christ* certainly shows his purposeful exegetical activity.

specifically what Moses' raised hands represented, only that the defeat of the Amalekites resulted. The point here, however, is that the dimension of prayer was mentioned by the preacher *without any indication on his part* that he was elaborating on or adding to the biblical text. As far as he was concerned, this is just what the text "said." In making his comment, the preacher was likely unaware of his "interpretation," nor was he aware of the origins of this tradition, one that has a long and honored history that goes back at least as far as *Targum Ps-Jonathan*.<sup>20</sup> Paul, of course, was not a modern day preacher, nor was he a product of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, he was a "product" of his own time, and it is precisely this fact that explains the nature of comments such as what we see in 1 Cor 10:4. The unconscious transmission and presence of exegetical traditions, not only in Paul's writings but in the New Testament in general, considered within the broader context of the literature of that time, is just what one would expect.<sup>21</sup>

To say that Paul was a product of his environment and that we cannot understand his understanding of the Old Testament without also understanding that environment has some implications that, on the surface, may seem incompatible with a high view of Scripture. After all, if at the very climax of redemptive history, the Holy Spirit can do no better than communicate the supreme Good News through pedestrian and uninspired Jewish legends, in what sense can we claim that the New Testament revelation is special, distinct, and unique? The question, however, can be put on its head: on what basis ought we to assume that Paul's understanding of the Old Testament was unique? To put it another way, is there anything about the nature of God's revelation itself that necessarily demands its uniqueness over against the environment in which that revelation is given?

The answer to this question must be no. In fact, it is the very nature of revelation that demands a firm historical setting.<sup>22</sup> That Paul's Old Testament, so to speak, is a function of his historical

20. Another analogy may also be seen in the modern "Study Bible." I have noticed more than once the blurring of the division between *biblical text* and *marginal note*, i.e., a biblical passage is "explained" by unwittingly reproducing the extrabiblical comment at the bottom of the page.

21. See for example the comment by D. McCartney: "When a person within a certain social context, who shares with the culture a certain way of thinking about reality, comes to a text, he or she understands that text in categories drawn from an already-extant understanding of everything" ("The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament," *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate* [ed. H. M. Conn; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988] 104).

22. Moisés Silva has a similar approach to discussing Heb 11:21 ("The New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Text Form and Authority," *Scripture and Truth* [eds. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge; 2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 147-65).

moment is analogous to the apparent tension between the divine and the human within the Bible. For example, there was the growing recognition, beginning in the latter portion of the nineteenth century, that the Greek of the New Testament was in every sense the language of the common people rather than a sanctified language unique to the New Testament.<sup>23</sup> The language in which Scripture was given was recognized to be firmly rooted in its historical moment. Related to this is the tendency on the part of the New Testament authors to cite the LXX over against the MT (e.g., the use of Isa 40:3 in John 2:23). The New Testament writers were simply citing the text with which both they and their audience were familiar. Such a view finds fuller expression in the nature of Scripture as a whole. A classic Christian affirmation is, in holding the "natures" of Scripture in tension (the divine and human elements), respecting both while making neither absolute. Our understanding of Scripture is neither Arian in denying its divine origin, nor Docetic in jettisoning its humanity. Perhaps the most obvious analogy is the person of Christ. As he is both fully divine and fully human, so too is the written revelation about him.<sup>24</sup>

I suggest that we understand the presence of Jewish exegetical traditions in the New Testament according to the same incarnational, or christological, model. Such a model, of course, is no recent invention.<sup>25</sup> And, like all analogies, it is not without its drawbacks.<sup>26</sup>

23. On this, see also M. Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible? The History of Interpretation in the Light of Current Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 10-14.

24. An OT analogy is found in the many descriptions of Yahweh in terms of common ancient Near Eastern imagery, e.g., Hab 3; Pss 29; 68:4.

25. Strong undercurrents of an incarnational approach to Scripture are evident, at least in the Reformed tradition (I can speak for no other), e.g., the writings of Calvin (his theory of "accommodation"), the Old Princeton School (J. A. Alexander, W. H. Green, B. B. Warfield), as well as the Dutch Reformed tradition (H. Bavinck, G. C. Berkouwer). Some examples of explicit treatments of the incarnational model are the following: J. Paterson Smyth, *How God Inspired the Bible: Thoughts for the Present Disquiet* (New York: James Pott & Co., 1892) esp. 119-35; J. Hannah, *The Relation between The Divine and Human Elements in Holy Scripture* (London: John Murray, 1863); K. B. Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration: A Review and Proposal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Two essays (with responses) in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987) are dedicated to this issue: J. I. Packer, "Inerrancy and the Divinity and the Humanity of the Bible," 135-51, and Kenneth Kantzer, "Inerrancy and the Humanity and Divinity of the Bible," 153-73. Two Catholic treatments include B. Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 95-113, and L. Alonso Schökel, *The Inspired Word: Scripture in the Light of Language and Literature* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967) esp. 49-53. One recent investigation of the christological analogy in Karl Barth's thinking is F. M. Hasel, "The Christological Analogy of Scripture in Karl Barth," *TZ* 50 (1994) 41-49.

26. The purpose of an analogy is to clarify a difficult concept by means of a known and familiar one. Perhaps the most obvious drawback of employing Christ's incarnation as a model to explain the nature of Scripture is the simple fact that the nature of

Nevertheless, an application of this time-honored approach to viewing Scripture casts the problem of 1 Cor 10:4 in a different light. The entire matter can really be stated in the affirmative: in view of the incarnational analogy, we can expect and hope for nothing less than Paul or any other New Testament writer to have understood the Old Testament in ways that were *firmly* in the popular discourse of the time. To affirm that Paul's "the rock that followed them" is an unconscious transmission of a popular exegetical tradition does not compromise revelation but boldly affirms it at its very heart. Scripture was revealed in time and space, so it bears the marks of that historical quality at various levels. Hence, our burden is to do all we can to understand the world in which the revelation was given.

Of course, 1 Cor 10:4 is not the only example of specific Jewish exegetical traditions in the NT. Paul (Gal 3:19), Luke (Acts 7:53), and apparently the author of Hebrews (2:2) seem to assign angelic activity to the mediation of the law given to Moses. Although this is not found in the OT,<sup>27</sup> it is a tradition documented as far back as *Jub* 1:27-2:1 and Philo's *Som.* 1.141-43. 2 Tim 3:8 explicitly refers to Jannes and Jambres, the magicians who opposed Moses in Egypt. These characters are not mentioned in the OT but are mentioned frequently in a variety of ancient sources as early as the CD 5.17-19. 2 Pet 2:5 calls Noah a "preacher of righteousness," a description found only outside of the OT (e.g., Jos., *Ant.* 1.73-75; *Sib. Or.* 1.125-31, 49-51). Jude 9 adduces the extrabiblical tradition of the archangel Michael's dispute with the devil over Moses' body (*Assumption of Moses*<sup>28</sup>) and in vv. 14-15 cites a portion of a prophecy supposedly uttered by Enoch (*1 Enoch* 1:9). Stephan in Acts 7:22 makes a point of mentioning Moses' education in Egypt, which is not in the OT but is a favorite topic especially in Hellenistic sources (for example, Philo's *Vita Mosis*, 1:21-24).

This is by no means an exhaustive list,<sup>29</sup> but even these examples show that the presence of extrabiblical Jewish traditions in the NT is

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Christ's incarnation is itself mysterious. Nevertheless, to refrain from using the incarnational analogy for the purpose of describing the nature of Scripture because of this mysterious content could, if taken to an extreme, cast aspersions upon speaking of anything in incarnational terms—including Christ himself. Perhaps it would be better to speak of a "parallelism" between the being of Christ and the nature of Scripture.

27. The notion is perhaps remotely suggested by LXX Deut 33:2 ("at his right hand were angels with him"), but as with 1 Cor 10:4, the three NT passages cited above are best understood as participating in the broader exegetical tradition. Furthermore, there is no clear indication in any of these passages that LXX Deut 33:2 is in view.

28. Such is the information provided by Clement of Alexandria (*Adumbrations on the Epistle of Jude*, ad loc) and Origen (*De Principiis* 3.2.1). See R. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 396 and Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, 1.924-25.

29. See the discussion in R. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon*, 395-405, especially his list on pp. 403-4. See also Peter H. Davids, "The Pseudepigrapha in

not peculiar to 1 Cor 10:4. The fact is beyond question and borders on a truism. The issue, however, is what to conclude from this fact, particularly with respect to inspiration. When we read 1 Cor 10:4 or Gal 3:19 or Jude 9, 14-15 or 2 Tim 3:8, one gets the impression that the NT writer was not doing anything other than relaying information that for him was trustworthy. Paul does not mention the moveable well or the mediation of the law by angels merely for illustrative purposes; one gets the clear impression that for him, it was really the case. In fact, there is no indication in any of the examples listed that suggest that the "legendary" material about to be introduced into these otherwise authoritative works were of lesser value. The NT writers do not defend the inclusion of these traditions, and this, it seems to me, strongly suggests that as far as they were concerned, no defense was needed. The concern for defense seems to come more from modern pens than theirs.

The presence of Jewish traditions in the NT should not be thought of as bearing witness to the writers' exegetical technique or hermeneutical method, both of which would imply a conscious appropriation of the material. Rather, it gives us a glimpse into the state of biblical interpretation during the time the NT was written—or better, a glimpse into the state of how widely diffuse and accepted particular interpretations of the OT had become, so much so that the interpretations and the texts went hand in hand. When reading the extrabiblical sources, one easily comes to the conclusion that the rock was thought to have followed the Israelites; the law was thought to have been mediated through angels; the names of the magicians of Pharaoh's court were thought to have been Jannes and Jambres; Noah was thought to have preached; etc. This is certainly true for the extrabiblical sources. It is also true for the NT writers. What the NT provides us with, then, along with these extrabiblical sources, is snapshots of how some portions of the OT were understood during the first century in Palestine. It reveals something of their "canon of biblical knowledge," what was thought at the time to compose a proper understanding of the OT. And when we consider the great mass of evidence from this period, we begin to gain an intimate familiarity with the exegetical world in which the apostles themselves thought and wrote, which is of no mean importance when we turn to virtually any aspect of NT exegesis, the NT's use of the OT, and Biblical Theology.

These brief comments do not presume to account for all the angles of this issue nor to have arrived at a comprehensive solution. Nevertheless, at the very least our doctrine of Scripture must be

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the Catholic Epistles," *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation* (eds. J. H. Charlesworth and C. A. Evans; JSSSup 14; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 228-45.

driven by the data of Scripture itself; Scripture must set the agenda, and not preconceived notions of what Scripture ought to be. Only then can we continually form a truly *scriptural* doctrine of Scripture.<sup>30</sup>

30. I would like to thank three of my colleagues for reading earlier versions of this article and for giving helpful feedback: Dr. Tremper Longmann, III, Dr. Moisés Silva, and Dr. Richard Gaffin.